

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****The Rise of Radicalization in the United States: Is the U.S. Government Failing to Counter International & Domestic Terrorism***

July 15, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The Rise of Radicalization in the United States: Is the U.S. Government Failing to Counter International and Domestic Terrorism”:

“Last month, in the wake of the domestic terrorist attack on nine parishioners at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, I sent the Chairman of this Committee a letter asking that this Committee hold hearings on the threat of domestic terrorism. In that letter, I asked that Federal witnesses be invited to appear before the Committee to testify about the threat from domestic terrorism and what the federal government is doing to counter the threat of extremist violence.

I believe that this Committee has a duty to conduct oversight of the Department of Justice’s and the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts and ask questions about how these threats are identified, mitigated, and responded to domestic terror threats. There are also overarching questions about the degree to which Federal efforts to counter extremist violence are focused on domestic terrorist threats. Unfortunately, today’s hearing will not bring us any closer to getting answers to these timely questions, as no one from the federal government is here to testify.

That said, I appreciate the Chairman’s willingness to engage on the subject of domestic terrorism and hold this hearing. I certainly hope that today’s hearing will be the first in a series of hearings on domestic terrorism. This Committee has a history of holding topical hearings. We held hearings in the wake of the Garland, Texas attacks, and last Congress we were holding hearings during the summer on the humanitarian crisis along the southwestern border, we also held hearings on the Ebola crisis.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in the wake of the South Carolina shootings, the Committee is now holding this hearing. Given that “addressing domestic terrorist threats” is a key element of this Committee’s bipartisan oversight plan, we should be working, on a bipartisan basis, to make it a priority. The threat from domestic terrorism is real; according to West Point’s Countering Terrorism Center, in the decade following the 9/11 attacks, right-wing extremist violence resulted in the deaths of 254 people in the United States.

Not surprisingly, a recent survey by the Police Executive Research Forum and Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security found that state and local law enforcement personnel are almost twice as worried about the risk of extremist violence by right-wing and anti-government groups as they are from foreign terrorist organizations.

So far this Congress, every terrorism hearing held at the Full Committee level has focused exclusively on threats posed by foreign terrorist organizations. Foreign terrorist organizations such as ISIL and Al Qaeda pose a significant danger to the United States. A number of domestic terror groups also pose significant threats. Unless we get serious about domestic terrorism, we run the risk of falling victim to what the 9/11 Commissioners called a “failure of imagination”.

Like foreign terrorist organizations, domestic terrorist organizations vigorously recruit and spread

propaganda through social media and in online chat rooms. Every day, foreign terrorist organizations dispatch thousands of messages online to promote their violent, terrorist ideology; domestic terrorist organizations do so as well. Over the past few years, sovereign citizen groups and other anti-government groups have successfully recruited new members through Facebook as well as extremist websites NewSaxon and Stormfront.

Interestingly, in the past, whenever we have discussed overseas-based threats, there has been an almost exclusive focus on propaganda circulated by foreign terrorist organizations. However, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Stormfront hosts subforums in over a dozen languages and nearly half its traffic comes from outside the United States.

Mr. Chairman, I agree with your statement, “we are facing an enemy whose messages and calls to violence are posted and promoted in real time”. Last month, on U.S. soil, approximately 500 miles from the Capitol, we saw firsthand how chat rooms and the Internet can spur acts of extremist violence by domestic terrorists when a man identified as 21-year old Dylann Roof massacred nine black Christians in the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Three days after the shooting, a racist manifesto allegedly written by Roof surfaced online. In this manifesto, Roof admitted to gathering information from the Council of Conservative Citizens, a well-known extremist group that has roots with the White Citizens Council, an associated network of white supremacists.

Photographs of the alleged perpetrator with oppressive symbols of the Confederacy and the South African Apartheid regime also surfaced online in the wake of the shooting. Even though the deadly attack in South Carolina is at the forefront of our minds, we cannot forget the foiled 2008 attempt to assassinate President Obama was planned by two white supremacists who were allegedly introduced on a social networking website.

It is important that we find ways to counter violent extremism, from both domestic and foreign terrorist organizations. The Administration has tried to pursue this avenue, but unfortunately, we still are unclear on what is being done, particularly at DHS. DHS refused to provide testimony today, and without hearing directly from the agency about its vision and needs, I cannot support H.R. 2899, the legislation this Committee is poised to consider later today.

I cannot embrace the bureaucratic solution that Chairman McCaul is offering to the homeland security challenge of extremist violence. We all have a responsibility to prevent terrorist attacks against Americans and on American soil and our actions should respond to the current threat environment. Not doing so would be a disservice to ourselves and the American public.”

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